

## **Interview with Sandra Lawrence**

Hi, my name is Sandra Lawrence. I live at Decker Towers at 230 St. Paul St, apartment 910.

### **What do you think about when you think about home and what it means for a place to be your home?**

I think of security, safety, my nest, a place to relax; a place to do the things in the quiet that I like to do. A place to have people come and visit with me, put on dinners for people, that sort of thing. A home...where you welcome your community and your family and friends.

### **Are there things about the larger community that bring out that feeling for you? Things that you're involved in that you go to for that feeling?**

The things that I have been involved in in the community have not been all that satisfying to me. They became more of a negative gripe session rather than a let's go forward and change things. I am a person who sees a problem and wants to come up with a solution and fix it. I don't want to just keep complaining about what's wrong—I want to fix it. So the things I have been involved with in the past have not met with my expectation. And the transportation to get to and from various meetings is always extremely problematic.

These are meetings around town. If you can get transportation you often do not have access to the building or the meeting room if you use a wheelchair or a walker for that matter, and without going in back alleys and backs of basement access, back accesses, which comes into your safety and security issues big time. If you're the only one in a wheelchair in the a meeting and you have to do that alone, it became very daunting for me, so I chose to opt out of those sorts of things.

So its been very hard, and we don't have nearly enough things with our community here in the building. You know, a reading club, a craft class that teaches and does crafts on other than a kindergarten level, more to our...we're elderly citizens; we're not infirm, we're not unintelligent...we could handle a fairly decent complicated craft, and none of those things are happening around here. A knitting class, a crocheting class, an embroidery class...things where you could learn a skill that you could take to your apartment and sit in a comfortable chair and continue with. A reading club where you could have a book that the club reads and discuss it. A trivia club. Trivial pursuit. Any of those things that keeps your brain working...and there just aren't any of those things that are started up around here. We had bingo but that's gone. And there's more to life than bingo

### **It sounds like you're life could be enriched by these sorts of challenging things?**

Absolutely

**Are there offerings for those sorts of things around town?**

That I don't know, and again, it would be transportation to and from. I know the senior centers do those sorts of activities, but I don't go to a senior center. I don't need to take up a seat at a senior center when there are other seniors who need to go there for day care. The adult daycares do those sorts of things and I'm not nearly ready for an adult daycare. So other than that, I don't know of anything around here that focuses on those kinds of skill building...anything...simple woodworking for the men...for the women too. I would love to take a simple wood working class.

**If those things were available, how could we improve advertising?**

I don't have a clear idea how to do it, other than with fliers, and fliers are restricted here in the building. But we have had some community events that have been put on fliers. It doesn't seem to attract a tremendous amount of attention...the fliers don't. We have a population of mixed skill levels here. We do have some people who do not read. We have people who do not read English. We have people who do not read, period. They've gotten along very nicely in their lives and very intelligently in their lives and they're not going to pay attention to a flier unless they have someone can read it to them, and that's a personal thing, and they're not going to say, "can you tell me what that flier says?"

**For people who can't read, there's not a place like the McClure Center in the Old North End where you can just happen upon during the day to walk in and see what's happening.**

I think that would be a very good idea.

**So something like the McClure center in the South End?**

You've got to understand too that it wouldn't necessarily hurt this building where we live if we had a designated area for community postings. Even something as simple as that could work. It would have to go through management and BHA.

**Are the community bulletin boards around here?**

No. We have something similar. The only problem is the posters are hard to read because there's a size limitation. Sometimes the print is really small because of the size limitation. You would just have to be, either way that we went with, to be retrained to look at it, to enjoy it, to browse it, and see what's important to you and what's not. Anything that would get the word out...And the more classes for this type of building that you can have inside the building itself, the more attendance you're going to have. And attendance happens over time, not at the first or second meeting. But maybe at the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting people will start to hear about it and come

in. You're dealing with a populace that is elderly, handicapped—mentally, emotionally or physically. You have to give them time to feel the safety and security of it. Are they going to be put down because they don't know how to do a certain task? That takes time, it doesn't happen over night. And transportation.

### **How to break down barriers to participation?**

Word of mouth works really great. "I'd love to go down and attend the crochet meeting. But I don't know how to crochet."

"Well do you want to learn?"

"Well, no, I don't..."

"It's fine, it's a wonderful atmosphere, nobody is going to matter that you don't know how. "

Word of mouth gets it out. The poster puts the idea there, and someone talks to them in the hallway.

### **What about programs with ReSource/Creative Reuse?**

They have a lot of materials. I get a tremendous amount of materials for my crafts from Resource.

### **But that hill is a barrier?**

My chair won't take it. I've done it with a walker, but I need someone to level it. And it's too far to go all the way around to it. But on a drizzly day when golly gee, what else am I going to do? Why don't I go to Resource? It's one thing to go shoot down the hill and go to Resource in the drizzle, it's another thing to walk a block and a half in the drizzle. And, I just find that it's a great place to go and spend two or three hours just looking around. I never get out of there without spending a little money, and their prices are mostly negotiable. Its wonderful.

We had a craft class that met once a month in the building, and I used to bring down all my excess craft materials that I had, and I thought that would be one thing I could do and that's fine except now I don't have my excess craft materials, and they don't have the craft classes anymore, so there's no outlet, and I just find that to be disturbing. I find shutting us away in little square, rectangular boxes is what it's all about. There's no real community viability without being able to transport yourself. And that's not as easy as just catching the bus, because, if you're in a wheelchair and the buss pulls up and there's already a wheelchair on the bus, they won't take you because there is nowhere to put you, and you have to wait for the next one to come.

And the bus schedule we do have is so complicated, it takes a near genius to figure out where its going and when its going to be there so you can rely on it picking you up. I don't figure it out all that well, and I'm a normally intelligent person. And I just cant figure that schedule out for anything. I usually end up calling the bus terminal and they don't like that, and they say "let us send you a bus schedule."

Its like the TV guide used to be so easy to read, so you could always turn to the day you wanted, the channel you wanted and find out what's on. And then they changed the format, Ok the format was good, it was bigger, but then you couldn't find what you wanted and when you anted it, you couldn't find out what was on at 9 on Tuesday evening.

I like the idea of a place, but again its transportation to get to that place. IN the good weather—summer—if you're in a wheelchair, you have problems on the sidewalks, which the city does not seem to feel, does not have the heart into repairing so that you can safely get from A to B on the sidewalk. SO that's a transportation issue. And the buses. If it was close by...there aren't bus stops close by. So you might just as well start from here and go, and then you're dealing with the sidewalk issues, which are major in this part of town. Major. And Pearl St. is another one.

I don't understand that. We are becoming a more pedestrian...It should be more walkable. The bike path. I would love to take my chair and travel the bike path, but I can't.

### **They don't maintain the bike path?**

Not good enough for my wheelchair. A bike can hit a twig in the road and you don't necessarily lose your balance. A wheelchair hits a twig? You are going to tip it over with you in it. Rocks and things are perfectly fine if you're walking or riding a bicycle. Not if you're in a wheelchair or using a walker. I'm not saying the bike path has to be paved...if it could just be level and sanded, that would be fine. Again, it takes somebody in a wheelchair to test out the theories

And then transportation becomes les of an acute problem, because you have safe sidewalks and you have safe access.

**Pretend transportation is fine. What things could you see in the 2-5 block radius, what kinds of things would be beneficial for you, your neighbors, the community, as the city is thinking about development? What does the community need?**

I'm not sure that I'm following your question. Because everything does hinge on transportation.

**But when you daydream...If this was near, if I had this nearby, thinking about this community, what kind of thing would actually benefit the community?**

I think a McClure center down here would help a great deal down here would help a great deal. Where you could take classes. The Burlington High School has night school. We get their fliers in the mail, and I look through them every time and would love to take some of their art classes that I see there. The skill based classes in computer and things of that nature. But they are of necessity in the high school. The high school is handicapped accessible, but not to a degree that you feel comfortable in a wheel chair. And it's very far from here. But once you get there, you have to go in such a way, I don't know if I can describe this...you've got to go know where you're going in the building and know all the ins and outs of how to get there. And if you don't, you have that factor to deal with. And sometimes that's a huge factor to deal with. "Well I don't know what I'm going to do when I get there, where am I gonna go?" And for me, that can cause panic attacks.

I like to take someone with me. If I'm going to take part in some other activity, I've got to find somebody else that wants to take part in that activity.

**If it was nearby and accessible, you might be able to get there and have other people from your community there?**

Right. It wouldn't be as complicated as the high school. It would be built or remodeled to be handicapped accessible. Elevators, no stairs, elevators, flat level as you go in, ramps and things of that nature. At the same spot that everybody else goes in. And then you find your way from there. If its not complicated its easy enough to do.

**Do you have any more thoughts about helping the community to be more inclusive from a quality of life stand point for folks who are living here? What kind of vision should the city keep in mind to make sure everybody who lives here can benefit from whatever development and changes take place?**

Is the word I'm looking for infrastructure? The sidewalks. The roads. The sidewalks, the basic means of getting to and from. Shuttle buses. You don't have to run a major bus. Shuttle buses that have more than one or two spaces for a wheelchair. If its minus six degrees out, as it gets in Vermont, the sidewalks can be in pristine shape and any length of time that your out in it is dangerous especially for the elderly, which is where the bus transportation is critical to get to any kind of community event or class.

**If there was a McClure Center kind of place here, might that change the transportation system by making a destination?**

Right now they're thinking in the box. We're talking about a shuttle system that operates on a neighborhood scale, coordinating their service with a center like the McClure Center. Is it the daycare or the senior citizens that picks up people from this building and takes people over there.

A lot of people take SSTA which is wonderful, but its...You have to set your time to take it. You have to allow "Okay, we'll pick you up at 9:15 to get you to a 10 o'clock appointment" which means they can show up ten minutes before 9:15 and you have to be ready for them, or they can take 20 minutes after 9:15, and you have to be willing to wait. That's a chunk of time...because that's the case coming home as well. That's a chunk of your day that's just spent waiting for this transportation, and it really makes you stop and think, "Do I want to spend two hours just trying to get to-and-from?"

Or, a shuttle bus that could take you on a same day notice, that you want to...the city bus you can do that with if its going where you need to go. SSTA needs a 48-hour notice before they can schedule a ride. Well if you wake up in the morning and you've got a 103 degree fever and your doctor says "get in here" you can't do it. It's not possible. That definitely impacts all areas of your life, because now you're impacted in your health and...whatever. And the CCTA bus does not go out to Colchester, so you can't just go out and catch the bus and have it take you to your doctors appointment because its not going to do it. It doesn't go out there. Really, for the city to do something, they have to do it in more than words. And they have to give it a little bit more than a cursory attempt. They have to think through it. How are we gonna get these people there, how are we going to get them home? Are we providing them with services that they want to attend, they want to come out...rather than just putting up a building or something and just saying "that's it."

**It's very clear to me that sidewalks, infrastructure, multi use pedestrian travel lanes, etc. would really enhance the quality of life for people living down here. What else do you want us to know or to think about?**

To be willing to work with people whether they have a handicap or not. To be willing to see the desire that they have to do something. The desire to make something with their own hands, such as a woodworking class. We can't afford tools. Nor do we have the living space to house the tools. SO going some place that has them, that has the instructor that are willing to work with somebody with shaky hands, but can still use a saw.

Adaptive golf, adaptive driving...there's got to be some sort of adaptive woodworking. Adaptive hands crafts, adaptive knitting and crocheting and embroidery, how do you do that?

Maybe they'll learn a different style of knitting. Those round looms that came out were perfect when I was having such a major, major problem with my hands. I was still able to knit, and I was still able to make the projects that I wanted to make on those looms, and it was just wonderful. Wonderful. There are things that are out there, if you can't see well there's all kind of magnifying situations for handy crafts. You could adapt that to woodworking. You could adapt those magnifiers to anything that you wanted to do. There's a lot of resources out there.

I have catalogs upon catalogs of adaptive devices and things that can help. Talking clocks, watches that talk. The one talking watch that I had would go off in church, so I stopped wearing it. The pastor would say, "yes, I'm running a little over" in response to my talking watch.

It's out there. Or we can make it.

There are lots of people out there. Elderly people that are retired, that could put whatever it was that they did when they working, into a...a metal fabricator for instance, would be able to help us figure out how to revamp something so this person could use it better.

**The idea of creating a space for those things to happen is what we could be incorporating into this.**

And fliers would come into handy with that too; because you could...do the elderly have...I don't like to use the word elderly. Does the retired population have a spot where they can go and list their services so that we can access...you know...Here's that metal worker that we need, that can put this spring on Sandy's walker for her so she can sit in the walker without the arm guards preventing her from doing so.

Shop classes in the high schools. What better way to start teaching young kids to think out of the box. It's an overused phrase. But they're in shop class and their shop class teacher can help them. "We have this person who needs such and such, let's see what we can do to build it, and let's build it."

These are all specific things that we need to some how, get out there and be able to...Like the Picket Fence for people who want to sell their own homes. A magazine like that, just a simple publication, it doesn't have to cost millions to produce. A newspaper, a flier like that, where you can call up and put your name on it and we can put it on. And there's a lot of people...that's a skill, a thinking skill, that a lot of people would want to work on something like that, rather than doing other skill building things. They're using their minds, and they're engaged with their community.